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Congressman Mark S. Kirk, R-10th, of Highland Park, has notified U.S. Navy officials that his support for housing improvements or expansion at Fort Sheridan and Glenview is tied to resolving issues of concern.

Kirk said he wants the value of new Navy housing at both locations put on the tax rolls, which will benefit school and park districts.

In addition, Kirk said he supports use of the Lake Michigan bluff area at Fort Sheridan, an area where eight endangered species live, as a migratory bird sanctuary,

In a letter to Navy Secretary Gordon England, Kirk wrote: "I support upgrading current housing and putting the value of these structures on the local tax rolls. This will help increase funding for our local schools."

He will work to improve Navy housing but said it must meet local zoning codes.

Kirk serves on the House Appropriations Committee and soon will join committee members in budget reviews, including that of the Navy.

In the school year 2002/03, the military sent 225 students to District 112 schools and provided \$165,105 to educate them, about \$734 per pupil. District 112, however, spent \$11,217 to educate each pupil, a gap in aid of about \$10,483.

Kirk said, "My main message to the Navy is: For me to support this program (of improved housing), the Navy must meet key environmental and education funding goals."

Speaking of alternative Navy plans to expand housing at Fort Sheridan, he said the effort will require "intense coordination with leaders of Highland Park.

"My position is Michael Belsky's position," Kirk added.

Highland Park Mayor Michael D. Belsky said, "I want all the stakeholders to have a say in what goes on including the schools, the city and the parks."

Belsky thinks the city and Navy will be able to work together. Contact with military officials in the past has been with the U.S. Army and focused on the north end of the base. Belsky said he knows Kirk shares the city's concern about potential impacts about Navy housing improvements or expansion.

Kirk said Navy officials have indicated they are amenable to using the bluff area as a migratory bird sanctuary.

North Shore School District Superintendent Maureen Hager said a key question for the schools is how many children the proposed housing yields. Depending on grade levels, 100 to 200 children could force the district to seek new land for a new school. Elementary and middle schools near the base are at capacity.

"That is a significant concern I have," she said.

Hager said it is possible the existing military housing is not being fully used and so the district does not have a sense of what the current status for educational needs is. This makes it difficult to comment on the issue of educating more children of military families.

"We like very much having the military family's children as part of our school family," she said.

Students and their parents bring a depth of experience and perspective that enriches the schools. She said families choose to live at Fort Sheridan so they will be able to go to the good

schools. They do not bring, however, funding needed to educate them. Not much money is contributed to local public schools by the military.

"We are primarily a locally-funded school district," Hager said.

In the past, she said, assurances were made by military officials but not much was done to provide for the education of children. She said planning also needs to be done for building, staff and faculty used to teach them.

"We can't do it on a haphazard basis," Hager said.

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